

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

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NEW STUDY SUGGESTS SPIKE IN INFANT MORTALITY ASSOCIATED WITH RADIATION FROM NUKE PLANTS

Markey Questions NRC on Health Risks of Living Near Nuclear Reactors

Washington, DC: Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the panel which oversees nuclear power regulation, today released a letter he sent to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) regarding health risks for communities who live close to nuclear reactors. A new study released today by Dr. Ernest Sternglass of the University of Pittsburgh suggests that infant mortality increased significantly in 2002, after operating capacity at 104 nuclear power stations reached its highest levels.

“The nuclear industry and the NRC have automatically dismissed all studies that link increased cancer risk to exposure to low levels of radiation,” said Rep. Markey. “The reality is that the data suggest that we should be taking this potential linkage much more seriously.”

Rep. Markey’s letter to the NRC was motivated by the ordeals of the Sauer family, former residents of Minooka, IL, which is located close to the Dresden nuclear power plant. The family has recently relocated because of concerns about the health impacts associated with living near the Dresden plant, which were heightened because of their daughter’s brain cancer. In June 2003, the NRC was presented with data obtained from the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) that indicate that in Grundy County, IL between 1995-99, the infant mortality rate has doubled, there has been a nearly 400% increase in pediatric cancer and a 38% increase in cancer among those aged 28-44 years old (while the same statistic for all of IL decreased by 8%). Moreover, other statistics show that the incidence of leukemia was 50% higher in men and 100% higher in women in Grundy County than it was in the rest of the State. In its responses to the Sauers, NRC personnel have ignored these statistics and have instead cited a 1990 National Cancer Institute (NCI) study entitled “Cancer in Populations Living Near Nuclear Facilities”, which has numerous flaws in design, since, as the authors themselves stated, the limitations in the design were accepted so that “it could be completed in a timeframe that was relatively short for a survey of such magnitude.”

In addition to the Sauer case, Rep. Markey’s office has been made aware of additional studies and data:

- Today, Dr. Ernest Sternglass of the University of Pittsburgh is releasing data at the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Washington DC indicating a spike in infant mortality that occurred in 2002, coming after operating capacity at 104 nuclear power stations reached its highest levels and increased at the highest rate in the U.S. between 1997 and 2001. His work also refers to a scientific paper indicating that low levels of radiation exposure during pregnancy is directly related to low birth weight which, in addition to infant mortality, has also been implicated in numerous chronic diseases, including autism, asthma, cognitive dysfunction, rheumatoid arthritis, anemia, obesity, heart disease and cancer.

- A 2003 article by Joseph Mangano et al in Archives of Environmental Health found elevated levels of childhood cancers in populations living within 30 miles of nuclear power plants between 1988-1997. For example, in Plymouth County, MA (near the Pilgrim Power plant), there was found to be a 14.6% increase in the numbers of childhood cancers as compared to the rest of the country. And in Essex County, MA and Rockingham County, NH (near the Seabrook Power plant), there was found to be a 24.8% increase in the numbers of childhood cancer mortalities.

“The NRC needs to study – not summarily dismiss - the connection between serious health risks and radiation released from nuclear reactors. I am urging the agency to investigate these risks, and I will continue to closely monitor the NRC’s progress in this important area,” Rep. Markey concluded.

For a copy of the letter sent to the NRC, please see www.house.gov/markey